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March minusivity: Strategies of immunising and counter-immunising in the atmosphere of the Polish 1968

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The article discusses mechanisms of social immunisation in the context of the so-called Polish March 1968. Whereas immunising strategies are a normal part of sociality, I argue that around 1968 a growing anxiety about the mechanisms of being-in-common led to an autoimmunitarian dissociation of the Polish society that I will conceptualise as an atmosphere of minusivity. Strategies to counter exclusions and discriminations were trapped in this immunitarian paradigm as well. A crisis of communication arose from the dissonance between the reality created by official language around March 1968, and the reality experienced by many people, as this latter reality was silenced and repressed. Mistrust in language resulted in an immunitarian retreat from affective communication that was replaced by impersonal communicative scripts. This communicative crisis widely prevented the March experiences to condense in cultural production of the time; nonetheless, I will try to retrace some of the immunitarian and counter-immunitarian strategies in literature, film, and retrospective accounts.

Keywords:
March 1968, PRL, immunisation, atmosphere, minusivity, commoning, language, communication

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The notion of 1968 in Poland marks a specific moment that is often seen as a turning point in the project of Polish communism. Whereas up to the late 1960s, the communist project appealed to parts of the older and younger generations despite the Stalinist experience, political historians detect a general negation of the belief in communist ideas after 1968, leading to the formation of oppositional movements (Gawin 2013; Siermiński 2016; Szacki 1988). This was due to the disappointment rising gradually after 1956, when the de-Stalinisation process introduced by Władysław Gomułka seemed to promise a more liberal and prospering society. However, in the 1960s it became clear that without reforms, the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) would intensify political pressure on society

while the system glided deeper into economic crisis (Zaremba 2004). Thus, youth protests for more social, cultural and political freedom arouse, but were soon crushed by political oppression and militia force beginning on 8 March 1968. These events collided with an officially encouraged anti-Semitic campaign after the Six Day War in 1967, the campaign accusing Poles of Jewish descent of a cosmopolitan "Zionism" that was said to corrupt Polish socialism from within. The media discourse in the years 1967-70 closely related "revisionism," the allegedly elitist call for reforms, with anti-Polish "Zionism." Both accusations affected the Warsaw intellectual sphere most, but reverberated in intellectual and Jewish circles throughout Poland, as they were picked up by wide parts of society. Apart from social isolation, dismissals, and sometimes internments of suspected individuals, a generational shift in the Party's power structure and other institutions emerged (Eisler 1998; Grudzinska Gross 2011; Osęka 1999; Osęka and Zaremba 1999; Tych 2014).

The unwillingness for reform, paired with power play and a contradictory racist campaign, manifested the corruption of the socialist system in the Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL). Many of the "March" generation's new functionaries showed a mostly careerist, socio-hierarchical interest in the system (Szacki 1988). The events known as March '68 reveal thus an instrumental intermingling of socialist class-struggle arguments with ethnic and social delineations and resentments. The image of an elite privileged and hostile to the socialist system was constructed to negatively contrast with an idealised socialist Polishness. The latter consisted of citizens of ethnic Polish working-class or peasant lineage that were now able to socially and politically advance, occupying the positions abandoned under pressure (Checinski 1982, 229; Friszke 2007, 134). March 1968 as a dispositive is thus closely tied to the image of a "proper" (Campbell 2011) community, while identities defined as improper or alien were excluded and othered. The anti-Semitic campaign and resentment against intellectual circles in the late 1960s thus furthered *ex negativo* the imaginary of a proper and "closed," ethnically homogenous nation (Michlic 2006, 248; Steinlauf 1997, 65–71; Zaremba 2011, 271–358).

Autoimmunitarian reactions

Around March 1968, strategies of social immunisation were omnipresent both on micro and macro levels. The two intertwined strands of anti-"revisionism" and anti-"Zionism" showed dynamics of inclusion through exclusion, inscribing people into the categories of "us" and "them." Political arguments intermingled with identitarian definitions, as ethnic lineage figured as a proof of one's ideological stance, while political convictions could easily be

understood as an indicator for improper descent. Many ethnic Poles felt thus pressed to procure their certificate of baptism (Osęka and Zaremba 1999, 237). Even though the slogans of the March campaign were rather simple and pithy, it became clear that a negative definition and exclusion could affect almost anybody, at least in the centres of power such as Warsaw. Wojtek Lamentowicz, then a student at Warsaw University and member of the party-dependent Union of Socialist Youth (Związek Młodzieży Socjalistycznej, ZMS), commented this later as follows:

> In the general climate two paradoxically complementary emotional trends dominated. The anti-repression shock reduced the issue of system change to the condemnation of the compulsion apparatus and to the demand for the rule of law; while the nationalist-communist frenzy searched for the enemy in its closest environment, tracing something alien and secret, reduced itself rather often to seeking out victims among Jews without regard to their stance. People affected by the shock of police-propaganda state aggression perceived themselves as victims of the system. The other ones, affected by the frenzy, tried to find for themselves a safe place in the institutional order by actively pointing out victims. This dramatic alternative – to be a victim or to co-create victims – produced due to its emotional consequences a whirl that drew in an awful lot of, even very rational and experienced people. I perceived the emotional infection by this narrowed field of choice as something humiliating, offending reason and the elementary rules of common sense. Those who participated in the creation of victims can be divided into two groups: those who did it voluntarily and with conviction, and those who lacked the civil courage to oppose it unambiguously. (Lamentowicz 1988, 44)

This lengthy quote is relevant in several aspects. It not only draws attention to the omnipotent division of society into two groups, the "victims" and the "victim-makers". It also points out the performative aspect this dividing had, as by pushing others into the excluded group, one could claim a space in the included group oneself. Of course, as these strategies of othering worked into many directions, this "safe place in the institutional order" was precarious and had to be re-created continually, while the "frenzy" (*amok*) lasted.

Another very important notion introduced by Lamentowicz is his term "emotional infection" (*emocjonalne zarażanie*). The notion of infection brings to mind the strategies of social immunisation that would prevent infection. However, to prevent infection was according to Lamentowicz not possible after March 1968: either one was a victim or one participated – willingly or unwillingly – in the creation of victims. Everybody was infected or affected. The immunisation then took place on the concrete level of categorising people and the self-installation on the proper side. Immunisation itself, so to speak, was the infection. As in autoimmunitarian reactions, the "disease" attacking the organism were the immunising mechanisms put into motion for protection. Thus, the performing of divisions and delineations

in the state apparatus and in society around March 1968 led to a further disintegration of society, instead of a "communitarian" consolidation of the "proper" group. This social crisis was reinforced by economic stagnation, a disintegration of the family sphere and a perceived destabilisation of the gender order (Czerwiński 1969, 91–93; Kosiński 2006, 235–69; Seiler in preparation; Sokołowska 1975, 165–69; Zaremba 2004). Survivalist pragmatisms that had to be staged again and again and on almost all levels of social life made it difficult to entertain unbiased relations to others, be they family members, colleagues, neighbours, officials or complete strangers in the streets.

Yet the other component in "emotional infection", namely emotions, are just as important. The autoimmunitarian crisis of 1968 played itself out, as Lamentowicz notes, on a level that contradicted "reason and the elementary rules of common sense." Its mechanisms annulled the intentions of "rational and experienced" (*rozumni i doświadczeni*) people. The emotional level brought into play the anxiety about the self's integrity and wellbeing, thus eventually leading people to contradict their own convictions. Anxiety, as Sara Ahmed notes, is in contrary to fear not tied to a visible object, but characterises exactly by its non-containment in a specific object, by the delocalisation of its source (Ahmed 2017, 1318). As noted above, around 1968 the need to re-perform social delineations could arise at any time and from any direction, depending on the dynamics the accusations developed. While the object of this demarcative anxiety dissolved, its bodily repercussions were intensified. Anxiety was incorporated, even more so, as biopolitical strategies used to in- or exclude people into the proper were also tied to bodily features and an imagined Jewish physical appearance, and to suspicious behaviour. The immunising strategies, thus, were on the most parts strategies evoked affectively in order not to be affected by othering.

Atmosphere of minusivity

While the time of the PRL is retrospectively often described as a specific "atmosphere" or "climate", both these terms become obsessively frequent regarding the time after March 1968. Wojtek Lamentowicz several times mentioned the atmosphere of events propagating "authoritarian-nationalist thinking," when he came into contact with "that which already is drawing close, stamps its feet and shouts" (Lamentowicz 1988, 44). His formulation procures an atmosphere of threat – not (yet) physical violence, but a potentiality of violence represented in the physical approaching of something obscure, and in yet undirected gestures of violence like stamping and shouting. Lamentowicz, having experienced the atmosphere in the hall during a speech by Mieczysław Moczar – a key figure in propagating ethno-nationalism around 1968

and aspiring First Party Secretary –, intended to "pass on" (*przekazać*) this uncanny atmosphere as a warning (Lamentowicz 1988, 43). While we do not have his actual report at our disposal, in his retrospective we can recognise strategies of verbally passing on an atmosphere as well: in the reconstruction less of the content of the speech than of the bodily reactions of the audience. The literary staging of atmosphere relies on the introduction of material elements, an additional *staffage* entering interaction with its surrounding. Similar to the notion of anxiety, an atmosphere does have both a bodily dimension – it can stick to or soak into bodies and things – and an immaterial characteristic that cannot be pinned down exactly but has the most astounding effects on bodies and behaviours. According to Gernot Böhme, an atmosphere can be understood as an "indeterminate spatially extended quality of feeling" entering the "bodily economy" (Böhme 2017, 15). Around 1968, the notion of atmosphere mirrors the notion of something invisible yet highly affective (Ahmed 2004; Brennan 2004; Leys 2017; Shouse 2005), of a certain force that disempowered the members of society without being explicitly verbalised or embodied, and that yet found its sedimentation in the bodies and practices of people. Precisely because of its effects on the mechanisms of human homeostasis (Muhle 2014, 85), the concept of atmosphere – as difficult as it might be to grapple with – is key in the analysis of the March experience.

In order to grasp the atmosphere that dominated during the March "frenzy" terminologically, I want to discuss the term "minusivity" (*minusowość*) that reporter and writer Ryszard Kapuściński had introduced in his novel *Cesarz* (The Emperor, 1978).[1] The term of minusivity (in the English translation called "negativism") as introduced by Kapuściński fits exactly the atmosphere of anxiety that was predominant around March 1968.

> I have trouble pinning it down, but you could feel negativism all around. You noticed it everywhere on people's faces, faces that seemed diminished and abandoned, without light or energy, in what people did and how they did it. There was negativism in what they said without speaking; in their absent being, as if shrunken, switched-off; in their burnt-out existence (Kapuściński 2006, 82).

Kapuściński portrays a general atmosphere of brooding, an atmosphere that can hardly be pinned down, that wafts in the streets and affects all citizens. Minusivity as a neologism nominalises this atmosphere, thus creating a *thing* that is both striking in its conspicuous image and its abstract, mathematical vagueness. The term underscores an element of alienation, while

1 The book, though set in Ethiopia and dealing with the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie around 1973/74, was often read as a criticism on the Polish situation in the 1970s and the rule of First Party Secretary Edward Gierek (Domosławski 2012, 240–43; Ziątek 1996, 171). Kapuściński might not have had in mind exactly 1968 when writing *Cesarz*; his description of minusivity however is embedded in a general post-March Polish atmosphere.

at the same time objectifying the immaterial source of anxiety. The term in my opinion helps to discuss the mechanisms of immunisation and commoning in the March atmosphere. In Kapuściński's definition, minusivity shows physically in the faces of the people and "in what they said without speaking; in their absent being, as if shrunken, switched-off." They appear as if they had retreated from public life, from interacting with each other in order to stay clear from the atmosphere. Minusivity translates both in its name and description into the realm of the absent, of retreat and repulsion in both verbal and bodily communication. To work with the concept of minusivity can thus support our understanding of how media discourse, social behaviour, and bodily repercussions interacted.

Immunitarian exclusions and refusals such as happening around March 1968 in Poland are, according to political philosopher Roberto Esposito, to be understood as the counterpart of *communitas* (Esposito 2010, 12).[2] Esposito strips both terms – *communitas* and *immunitas* – to their common linguistic core of *munus*, pointing out the two-sidedness of the mechanisms of being-together. He states that society bases on the exchange of *munus* that knits an invisible net of ever-flowing needs, dependencies, and debts – where *munus* should not be denoted solely as a gift but rather as the debt that arises when receiving a gift or service (Esposito 2010, 4–11). *Munus*, Ruggiero Gorgoglione adds, is not the duty nor the gift, but "the interaction of these two forms of social practices [Handeln]" (Gorgoglione 2016, 193). In discussing Esposito's terminology, Greg Bird notes the contradictory senses in the word *munus*, that at the same time denotes opening up and closing off and thus inherently points towards "lessen[ing] (lack, diminish, minus)" both the self and the common (Bird 2016, 161). The subjects, Bird concludes, are "each […] commonly exposed to the lack, which Esposito argues is the common" (Bird 2016, 161). The common implies a sort of negative "valency," a minus that opens the space for the relation to the other.[3] The minus derived from *munus* is thus the quality of social being as a being-with: it points towards the impossibility of completely isolating the subject that is always entangled in a network of relations and dependencies. The subject's social homeostasis bases on mechanisms of commoning and immunising, opening and closing the fluctuating borders between the self and the other and thus installing the liminal sphere of the common and mutual affect (Massumi 2002, 214).

2 *Communitas* figures as community installed not by identiarian similarities and exclusions, but by acknowledging affective relations and difference. While *communitas* flourishes on communication that transgresses borders, *immunitas* translates as the withdrawing from communication, as the refusal to acknowledge a common denominator allowing for interaction and association.

3 Understood in Eliasian terms, valencies determine the relations between human beings and constitute the (structured) need to associate; thus, Norbert Elias calls them „affective valencies". (Elias, n.d., 131 f.)

An autoimmunitarian crisis, however, destabilises the homeostatic balance. Whatever the motivation behind it, the attempt to reach a "proper" entity inevitably works through mechanisms of immunisation and exclusion of the other. We are living in "conditions of unwilled adjacency" (Butler 2004, 134), and the thought of being affected, associated, contaminated, or touched by an other, of something occurring that is beyond direct control of the self, threatens the self-image of motility and individuality. Yet the strife to disengage from the other and to function as a self-sufficient entity that has no share in the doings – and especially the wrongdoings – of others, at the same time discloses mutual interconnectedness and entanglement. The self's being-in-minus is a function of being-together. The more the common space is diminished, the more threatening it becomes; intensified immunisation enhances the impression of precariousness and anxiety about the self. Thus, the rise of immunitarian mechanisms around 1968 provoked a potentiation and branching out of further strategies of immunisation in order to withdraw from the threat of the common. This spread of immunitarian processes as a response to the awareness of a common being-with is what I call minusivity – the autoimmunitarian "disease" resulting from and attacking the common being-in-minus.

In a novel published in 1969, we can find a similar reasoning about the pathogenesis of an atmosphere of minusivity. I have in mind Wiesław Jażdżyński's novel *Sprawa* (The Case, 1969), a not very well known text by a writer associated with Kielce and Łódź.[4] The novel revolves around a case of denunciation due to career motives; its connection to the March affairs seems to be wholly absent if not the obstinate parallels to what is happening after March 1968, parallels that lie exactly in the mechanisms of exclusion, immunisation, and anxiety about the self. The main figure Wojciech recalls: "I don't remember many details, but I remember the heavy, thick atmosphere of abandonment and probably fear; I don't even know how to call that kind of feeling." (Jażdżyński 1969, 139)[5] The quote shows how the novel connects the impalpability of the phenomenon experienced with its strong emotional dimension; it points out an almost physical tangibility of the atmosphere translated into terms of "materiality." When Wojciech muses about his case, he also reflects the workings of a common sphere.

> I'm not an isolated and independent being […]. I'm a man who lives among people and cases. […] What limits my freedom in the most absolute way? The fear of the other man that

4 The author's position is an ambivalent one if seen in the light of the March events. Jażdżyński joined the PZPR in 1968 (Duk 2001, 203) but seems in his novel neither to follow the ethno-nationalist paradigm nor to treat the communist framework instrumentally. He directs his critique rather at society and careerism than at the state apparatus as such.

5 "Nie pamiętam, już wielu szczegółów, lecz pamiętam gęstą, zawiesistą atmosferę opuszczenia i chyba strachu, sam nie wiem, jak nazwać tego rodzaju uczucie."

> could do me harm and procure a case? Yet in this case, the meaning of life would be the flight from people, and in the end the lonely death of Narcissus. (Jażdżyński 1969, 141)[6]

The realisation of common interdependencies is here at once complicated by the focus on "cases" that work in-between the subjects and that they might employ to "do harm" to each other. These elusive yet powerful cases separating and binding together subjects – "a negative system […] operating between people and things" (Kapuściński 2006, 83) – are moreover closely tied to the impersonal bureaucratic system that can be instrumentalised in the processes of immunisation. The fear about one's own subjectivity ("what limits my freedom?") is thus "the fear of the other man." The result of this anxiety and fear of affection would be the "flight from people" and the attempt to immunise, even though in the beginning of the quote stands the realisation that the self cannot be "an isolated and independent being." The effects of an atmosphere of minusivity – the need to immunise in view of a threatening commonality – are thus autoimmunitarian reactions that cut in the immunising subject's very own flesh, destroying its sociality.

Countering minusivity

In view of the dead end a "flight from people" inevitably leads to, *Sprawa*'s protagonist Wojciech in the end comes to the conclusion that "[l]ike that, of course, it cannot be." (Jażdżyński 1969, 141)[7] He turns minusivity around, stating that one has to live with the minus-quality, the fact that every subject is open to others and will be affected: "it's impossible to live without suffering failures from which you have to recover, without dragging weights. There is only one way, the way of engagement that may be painful" (Jażdżyński 1969, 141).[8] The narrator in *Sprawa* morphs the mechanisms of social immunisation – of distancing – into a form of immunisation that could be called biological, working through contamination, engagement and transformation (Mohan 2020, 11:07 ff.; Muhle 2014, 86). Even if the "positive" turn in Jażdżyński's novel might be narratively abrupt or even implausible (Duk 2001, 221), it shows the effort to revaluate the depressing atmosphere of the figure's "personal" minusivity into an edifying episode that allows to elude total immobilisation. However, if we look at some examples relating directly to March 1968 in Poland, we rarely see the effects of social

6 "Nie jestem bytem wyizolowanym i niezależnym […]. Jestem człowiekiem, który żyje pośród ludzi i spraw. […] Co moją wolność ogranicza w sposób najbardziej bezwzględny? Lęk przed drugim człowiekiem, który może mi wyrządzić krzywdę, wytoczyć sprawę? Ależ w takim wypadku sensem życia byłaby ucieczka od ludzi, a na końcu samotna śmierć Narcyza."
7 "Tak, oczywiście, być nie może."
8 "[…] niepodobna żyć bez ponoszenia klęsk, z których trzeba się podnosić, bez dźwigania ciężarów, Jest jedna tylko droga, droga zaangażowania, może i bolesnego […]."

minusivity really come to a halt even if countering measures of commoning or "engagement" are undertaken.

When writer Anna Kowalska noted on 18 May 1968 into her diary: "Call from Ania Linke. She's coming on Monday. Under these circumstances I can't refuse anyone who is a Jew," (Kowalska 2008, 521)[9] she was well aware that she would rather have been supposed to refuse to invite a Jewish person over to her place. Kowalska instead staged an ostentatious reversal of this mechanism of exclusion. Being Jewish would in this case imply automatic *inclusion*, without regard to the actual sympathies the writer had for the specific person or considering her own well-being (she was ill at that stage). Kowalska hence took over the over-signified identitarian markers, as both the social exclusion as well as her personal inclusion focused upon the Jewishness of the given person. Yet given the affectiveness of the March categories, Kowalska inviting Linke would enhance the inviter's "otherness" and lessen the invitee's exclusion, bringing them closer and thus destabilising the ethnic delineations performed around March 1968. This case of positive discrimination was played out on a small-scale level; it was intended probably as a signal for Linke and their common social environment. Its notation in the diary might have functioned as a reminder for Kowalska herself and as a testimony for the potential readers of the diary. Seen on the general scale of the March crisis, however, her gesture was isolated in a specific and small circle of critical intellectuals who were as a liminal group already residing on the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion.

A similar, yet more demonstratively "public" approach showed Polish scholar Maria Janion. We learn from an interview published in 2012 that she was strongly affected by the immunitarian propaganda following the student protests in March 1968. This resulted in an effort of "engagement":

> In the morning I was listening to the radio, I understood what was going on, what is the direction of all of this. I went to my courses and there held a fiery speech condemning anti-Semitism. I remember that I was really shocked; after sharing this with the students I felt a bit better. And yet a student […] told me, that she and her colleagues had been talking and came to the conclusion that I must be a Jew after all, since I spoke like that about anti-Semitism. (Janion and Szczuka 2012a, 1:141)[10]

9 "Telefon Ani Linke. Przyjdzie w poniedziałek. W tych okolicznościach nie mogę odmówić nikomu, kto jest Żydem."

10 "Rano wysłuchałam radia, zrozumiałam, co się dzieje, jaki jest kierunek tego wszystkiego. Udałam się na swoje zajęcia i tam wygłosiłam płomienną mowę potępiającą antysemityzm. Pamiętam, że byłam naprawdę wstrząśnięta, po podzieleniu się tym ze studentami trochę mi ulżyło. A jednak studentka […] powiedziała mi, że koledzy i koleżanki rozmawiali między sobą i doszli do wniosku, że jednak muszę być Żydówką, skoro tak przemawiam w sprawie antysemityzmu."

Considering this quote, we can recognise two conflicting strands of immunisation: the exclusion of the "other" transported in the March propaganda, and Janion's following attempt to immunise her students against these social mechanisms. Similar to Kowalska above, Janion's engagement resulted from the atmospheric intensification of immunitarian requests to dissociate from alleged Jewish revisionists. The radio broadcast itself intended to be socially contagious, to infect the listeners with minusivity and to set loose the exclusionary, anti-Semitic "frenzy." The news affected Janion bodily, as she felt a "shock" (*byłam naprawdę wstrząśnięta*). The state of shock, related to paralysation or a certain loss of control over bodily and mental reactions, refers back to the way Lamentowicz described the March propaganda's effect: many people that passively consented, but also the development of a "frenzy" that did not rationally connect to the convictions of the given person.

Even though Janion later also described her reaction to the March events as a frenzy (*mania*), she managed to translate the immunitarian mechanisms into a frenzy of commoning (Janion and Szczuka 2012b, 2:32 f.). Her impulse of engagement could be called "self-transgressive" (Muhle 2014, 85) as it reached out and exposed her in place of and for the ones pushed out. If Janion had set out to unveil and deconstruct the logic of exclusion and social categorising. Thus, her strategy of immunising from immunitarian tendencies would be not a simple act of solidarity, but a commoning that referred to a *communitas* of "infinite singularities that are plurality" (Esposito 2013, 55; Magun 2012, 142), perceiving the common being-in-minus as a chance.

If we understand Janion's resulting speech as a performative act, there are to levels of performance visible in the quote above. There are, first, transformations on the corporeal level, induced by speech acts. The inter-reaction of spoken word and bodily repercussions in the quote demonstrate the processes of commoning and immunising's working on the affective level. The radio broadcast induces a shock, but the effort of translating this shock into a speech and delivering it to the students has physical effects as well. The sharing of anxiety that Janion undertakes in her lecture, a sort of commoning her shock and sorrow while at the same time engaging with the perceived atmosphere verbally, bring alleviation and dissolve the paralytic shock. This self-transgressive element of her reaction is however pushed back by her students in a secondary performative step that lies contrary to Janion's immunising intents. Instead of immunising themselves to the contagious propagation of strategies of excluding "others," the students immunise from being-in-common. They intuitively decide upon an immunitarian locking-up of their lecturer in the "other" group, distancing her from themselves. It seems that in the atmosphere around March 1968, the categories of in- and exclusion were permeable

enough to threaten everybody; to think beyond these provided categories and labels must have been almost impossible. If someone was confronted with a negative, excluding label, the first impulse was rejection. To close this line of thought, a short glance at a note by the writer Józef Hen, who was heavily pressed by anti-Semitists around 1968, confirms these effects of immunitarian exclusions. Hen subsumes his March experience as following: "The debate boils down to defend oneself from false charges, that one is a Zionist, revisionist, cosmopolitan or someone of the likes." (Hen 1992, 108)[11] Hen, confronted with this writing him off, did not question the erected borders, deconstruct such labels or even embrace them. Instead, strategies of immunisation were again met with strategies of immunisation, thus in the end contributing to the spreading of minusivity.

Crisis of communication

I have hinted above at the entanglement of language and the contagion with minusivity. The processes of immunising, labels of exclusion and discrimination were most effectively spread by verbal communication, as social behaviour and the occasionally displayed physical violence had a limited range. The March discourse performed as an socio-aesthetic method on a communicative level. It created an official reality that constantly adjusted, redefined, and hierarchically ordered certain terms and labels (Głowiński 1991, 32). Even so, the mechanisms in language worked on an affective level as they hurt people, revived Holocaust traumas and led to socio-physical exclusions. In the interplay between language, emotions, and bodily integrity, the toxic atmosphere of minusivity developed. And yet, while language translated into affect, affect could practically not be translated into language.

The reality "told", defined by propaganda and pre-scripted communicative patterns, claimed the whole discursive space. The reality "experienced" however, personal impression, feelings, anxieties, even certain social situations or events one participated in, could not find an expressive dimension (Lamentowicz 1988). The official March speech blurred out the expressibility of personal experiences – and thus their social existence began to vanish. Instead, they sedimented in the affected people's bodies and memories. Their "namelessness" made them into an eerie im-presence enhancing the March anxiety. Many participants in the student protests, or people affected by the media campaign against revisionism and Zionism retrospectively speak of an isolating moment and a huge uncertainty as to what had actually

11 "Polemika sprowadza się do tego, żeby wybronić się od nieprawdziwych zarzutów, że się jest syjonistą, rewizjonistą, kosmopolitą czy kimś podobnym."

happened (Kuroń 1989, 306). They came to distrust their own experience and memory, beginning after some years to believe in the "official" reality.[12]

The impact of March minusivity did not leave many visible and recognisable traces in the cultural production around 1968. The atmosphere itself was co-produced by a massive coverage of March discourse and language in media; its less publicly known side manifests in snippets of denunciations and inter-institutional notes, letters and other information found after years in the archives. But there was hardly any material that reflected the March events and atmosphere from a personal point of experience, or as an important phenomenon of the time. The finding of a language for the events and atmosphere was difficult or impossible precisely because of the sub- and suprarational character of the March "frenzy" playing out on emotions; but also because the immunising mechanisms had cut interpersonal bonds and the possibility for verbal exchange. Cultural, literary and film scholars have stated that the March events in terms of content appeared only later in the arts, especially concerning the "victims'" side (Buryła 2013; Majmurek 2018; Molisak 2008).[13]

The language paradigm installed around 1968 dominated the structuring of reality, of economic and political dynamics as well as "private" matters like family or friendship. It operated through communicative scripts that organised the interaction in almost every situation (Barańczak 1975; Burska 2013; Molisak 2008). "Language began to be regarded as a means of disowning reality and an instrument of political propaganda. This was […] a declaration of mistrust in speech." (Molisak 2008, 280 f.) The strongly marked semantics of the terms used by the media and officials sometimes drastically shifted; together with the official discourse's incongruity with the reality experienced by many, this reformulation of language produced an "atmosphere of absurd and falseness" (Sitkowska 2008) following March 1968. According to art historian and curator Maryla Sitkowska, this atmosphere had even "the stronger influence on the consciousness and morale" (Sitkowska 2008) of the youth than the very – yet uncommunicable – events themselves. If we understand atmosphere as the "common reality" (Böhme 2017, 20) of experiencing subject and its environment, we realise that the March atmosphere was torn; it characterised by an atmospheric dissonance. The clash and dissonance of two realities was the nourishing ground for the March minusivity. The refusal to be in

12 That is what several participants who had been contemporary witnesses expressed in the symposium "Doświadczenie (auto)biograficzne a tożsamość. Zapisy literackie pokolenia Marca '68" (The (auto)biographical experience and identity. Literary notes of the March '68 generation) and the conference "March ʻ68. Fifty years later" held in March 2018 at the University of Warsaw and POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. See also (Modzelewski 2013, 144).

13 There are some exceptions, but they keep accordance with the dominant language, serving the ethno-nationalist paradigm, e.g. Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski's *Głupia sprawa* ("Too bad", 1969) or Roman Bratny's *Trzech w linii prostej* (Three in a straight line, 1970). (Molisak 2008, 283 f.)

common mirrored in a crisis of communication; the mistrust in language as a means of interpersonal exchange was the flip side of the anxiety of being affected by an other.

Communication is a form of exposure – with communicative performance, an opening towards the world or the other is taking place – and thus always "insecure" and at "the risk of being rejected or lost or not received" (Blanchot 1988, 12, 22). This insecurity of the communicative act became crucial in minusivity. The opening that communication created translated as the space where the outer world could enter, where violations could happen. It seemed hence advisable to organise communication in its most formal way, conveying as few personal "content" as possible. The scripts offered by official language became the instruments of minusivity that allowed to retreat from affective contagion because of their impersonal character. They shielded off the self, leaving the involved subjects untouched in their mere enactment of communication. The communicative scripts in the late 1960s not only gained momentum because official language enforced them, but also because personal affective interaction was perceived as perilous to the self and its social position.

This is vividly present for example in the film comedy *Rejs* (The Cruise, 1970) by Marek Piwowski, where an "entertaining" get-together of ferry passengers turns into a series of incorporated verbal "meeting" patterns. The passengers prefer to act out something like a badly learnt theatre piece instead of exposing themselves with personal content – when that happens, the other passengers frame it by misunderstanding or blunt ignorance. However, the bodies of the passengers in the assembly betray their unease to the film viewers in twitches, sweating, or nervous glancing about. The uneasiness of the bodies confronted with a scripted speaking in slogans almost throughout the film produces an atmosphere of staging, where the personal information conveyed in affective outbursts is painted over at once by a scaffolding of "correct" behaviour acted out mainly through verbal reprimands. The analysis of the film *Rejs* thus suggests that while the official reality is present in verbal language, the experienced, affective reality surfaces solely in non-verbal communication that is harder to control (Kurz 2015; Łuczak 2002; Seiler 2019; Talarczyk-Gubała 2007, 101–11).

While film is a medium that can easily play with the dissociation of verbal (auditive) and body (visible) language, literature needs to express both layers in verbal language. Yet here, too, the split between the two communicative layers can become evident. When the protagonist in Jażdżyński's *Sprawa* wants to find out who meddled in his "case," he actively preys on non-verbal betrayals in-between verbal scripts. Neither he nor his communication partners mention his case; instead, Wojciech offers "small talk" scripts of former friends not having seen each other for a long time:

> – As you see, I'm still alive! Does that surprise you?
> That should have been a very clever question, cunning and carefully prepared. If he had a hand in my case, he should feel confused; after all, he's a simple lad, so something will show on his face. But nothing shows. (Jażdżyński 1969, 62 f.)[14]

Wojciech fails to find any decisive information either in verbal or non-verbal communication. Instead of aiding in his quest for truth, his mistrusting way of communicating intensifies his own insecurities, doubts and (false) presuppositions. The quote shows how this operating in scripted "traps" produced cumulative layers of mistrust in communication and a paranoid state of Wojciech's mind. This state is even conceptualised in the book by another former fellow, now psychiatrist. Wojciech oscillates between taking the psychiatrist's explanations for what they are – a description of a "psychogenic disorder" called "negativism" (Jażdżyński 1969, 75) of one of his patients – and reading them as a hidden diagnosis for himself.

Wojciech's case is not verbalised for "us" – the reader and the protagonists – in the book until very late. Yet, it roots in a verbalisation: in the verbal denouncement by his former boss. Even though the information delivered to the authorities turns out to be irrelevant if not false, Wojciech's work and social life as well as his own mindset or "social belief" collapse (Duk 2001, 220). This confirms the danger emanating from verbal language and its affective power that elides the control of the subjects. Other than Wojciech himself, his acquaintances

> learnt immediately about my case and preferred not to meet me. […] Around me, an emptiness crept up. […] [B]ecause of this information they were somehow better than others, they could already inform further without risk, while I was hurled about by the darkest premonitions. (Jażdżyński 1969, 139 f.)[15]

Information about others, irrelevant if true or not, seems to have been the currency in this atmosphere. The ones in possession of the information had the (immunising) power over worse informed others that were vulnerable or already hurt. The distribution of information construes barriers between the informed and the uninformed. But these barriers are precarious. The informed are at risk of losing their temporary immunity – gained by informing about others – and to have their vulnerability realised when information about them begins to circulate, as the later downfall of Wojciech's former boss demonstrates. So, even if *Sprawa* is not a novel

14 "– Jak widzisz, jeszcze żyję! Dziwi cię to?
To miało być bardzo chytre pytanie, podstępne, starannie przygotowane. Jeżeli maczał palce w mojej sprawie, powinien się zmieszać, to przecież prosty chłopak, więc coś się zaznaczy na jego twarzy. Ale nic się nie zaznacza."
15 "[…] oni dowiedzieli się momentalnie o mojej sprawie i woleli mnie nie widywać. […] Wokół mnie przyczaiła się pustka. […] byli wskutek tej informacji jakby lepsi od innych, bez ryzyka mogli już sami informować dalej, a mną miotały najczarniejsze przeczucia."

dealing with the March 1968 events, it retraces the immunitarian strategies used when social anxiety of being negatively affected is heightened and shows the autoimmunitarian social dissociation under the conditions of minusivity.

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